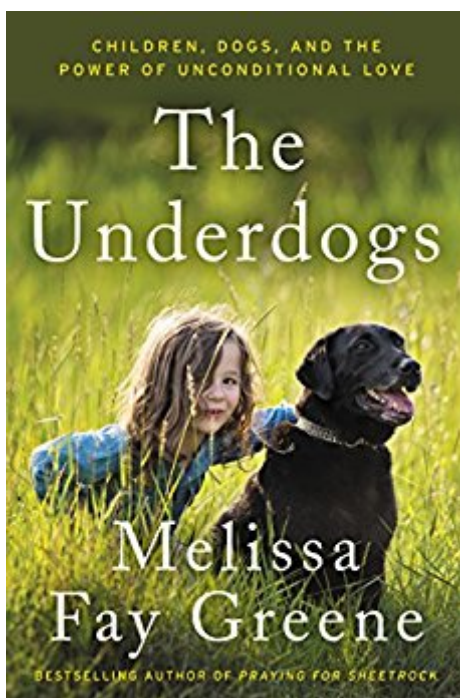


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The Underdogs: Children, Dogs, And The Power Of Unconditional Love



Synopsis

From two-time National Book Award nominee Melissa Fay Greene comes a profound and surprising account of dogs on the front lines of rescuing both children and adults from the trenches of grief, emotional, physical, and cognitive disability, and post-traumatic stress disorder. *The Underdogs* tells the story of Karen Shirk, felled at age twenty-four by a neuromuscular disease and facing life as a ventilator-dependent, immobile patient, who was turned down by every service dog agency in the country because she was "too disabled." Her nurse encouraged her to tone down the suicidal thoughts, find a puppy, and raise her own service dog. Karen did this, and Ben, a German shepherd, dragged her back into life. "How many people are stranded like I was," she wondered, "who would lead productive lives if only they had a dog?" A thousand state-of-the-art dogs later, Karen Shirk's service dog academy, 4 Paws for Ability, is restoring broken children and their families to life. Long shunned by scientists as a manmade, synthetic species, and often referred to as "Man's Best Friend" almost patronizingly, dogs are finally paid respectful attention by a new generation of neuroscientists and animal behaviorists. Melissa Fay Greene weaves the latest scientific discoveries about our co-evolution with dogs with Karen's story and a few exquisitely rendered stories of suffering children and their heartbroken families. Written with characteristic insight, humanity, humor, and irrepressible joy, what could have been merely touching is a penetrating, compassionate exploration of larger questions: about our attachment to dogs, what constitutes a productive life, and what can be accomplished with unconditional love.

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Customer Reviews

Once again, Melissa Fay Greene has created a beautifully balanced book UNDERDOGS, in which she weaves three storylines together: the intriguing evolution of our relationship with dogs, the inspirational story of Karen Shirk's non-profit organization 4 Paws for Ability, and most powerfully, the tales of how service dogs so heroically befriend children struggling with gut-wrenching and sometimes life-threatening disabilities, so often saving them from lives of isolation and sadness! But really, this engrossing and empathetic tale is about love – love of parents who do whatever it takes to provide the absolute best for their children, love of Karen Shirk and her 4 Paws For Ability team who miraculously train dogs to offer children and their families another lease on life, the unconditional love of dogs for their "charges", and finally, the enthusiastic and steadfast love children develop for their new (and often only) best friends! A must-read – you will laugh, learn, cry, and never, ever get too mad at your canine family member, finally knowing what he is really capable of thinking and feeling!

Melissa Fay Greene's beautiful, inspiring book begins with the story of Karen Shirk, who was diagnosed with a neuromuscular disease at age 24. Facing life as a ventilator-dependent, immobile patient, she fell into severe depression as she was turned down by every service dog agency in the country because she was "too disabled." A sympathetic nurse suggested she train a dog herself, and thus was born 4Paws For Ability, which today serves children who are "too disabled" for an ordinary service dog. Shirk's idea is beginning to catch on with other service-dog agencies but she was there first and this is her story. It's also the story of the relationship between the severely disabled children and parents at their wits' end, who finally come to the idea of trying a service dog. It's also the story of the dogs themselves, some abused or abandoned as puppies but all trained to bring comfort and help to their charges with severe autism and others with multiple physical cognitive and emotional disabilities. I read it practically in one sitting, laughing and crying, and admiring equally Karen Shirk, the parents of the children, and Melissa Fay Greene for this wonderful book.

There are just so many things to love about THE UNDERDOGSâ "interlocking stories of rescued pets who then rescue people from a lesser lifeâ "but if I had to pick the main thing that caused me to race through this book itâ "s the humor and heart that keeps you engaged page after page. This book is an ever changing mix of breathtaking stories, accessible and fascinating neuroscience and the biography of a woman, Karen Shirk of 4Paws for Ability, who pulled herself back from the brink and found her true calling in dog training. Greene's deft reporting takes you so deeply and richly into each topic that picking a favorite tale is like choosing between a dozen adorable puppies at the pound. THE UNDERDOGS takes us from Atlanta to the Midwest to Alaska, yet the focus is always on a story of catastrophe and redemption: a child so impaired that thereâ "s surely no hope of breaking through, coupled with a well-trained mutt with twin gifts of empathy and fortitude. In THE UNDERDOGS we learn that Lassie really does exist, and getting Timmy out of the well was just a start. Youâ "ll never look at dogs the same; I know I stare at my own rescue pups with newfound wonder and respect. What an incredible book.

Hereâ "s the thing: while Melissa Faye Greeneâ "s newest book, "The Underdogs," is filled with anecdotes about wonderful dogs, their trainers and owners, and the children they save, it is so much more than that. Itâ "s an amazing crossover book with somethingâ "quite literallyâ "for everyone. There are, of course, the dogs; thereâ "s the fascinating story of their subtle intelligence and their new role as guardians of children with autism and other striking debilities; and then thereâ "s Ms. Greeneâ "s own role as a most compassionate observer. Sheâ "s a remarkable guide, taking us through a universe in which we are beginning to see ourselves less as masters and more as fellow-creatures. Thereâ "s a wealth of arresting detail that she synthesizes with humor and skill, and, finally, we find that we have joined the bookâ "s families. Like them, we are left movedâ "even changedâ "by what this book and its writer have revealed to us.

This book was amazing, it's been awhile that I was so moved by a non-fiction book! This story really helps you to understand the world of the service dogs and all the various reasons a person might want or need one. The story does bounce around, but not in a confusing way. It follows a lady who created her own service dog training company including the history behind why she created it and why she is so enthusiastic about it's future. It also follow several families and their positive experiences with service dogs in their family and really shows you why these dogs are needed. It also talks a bit about helping convicts through their sentencing by being able to help train some of these dogs. This industry is so much more than people realize, if you have even looked at a dog

wearing a service vest and wondered anything about them...then you should read this book!

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